

**China-India Feminist Economics Workshop**  
**Gender dimensions of paid and unpaid work in China and India**  
Kunming, China, 26-28 September, 2014

**Summary Report**

**DAY 1: 26<sup>th</sup> September 2014**

**Opening Session: Welcome and Introductory Address**

**Jayati Ghosh** (Jawaharlal Nehru University) opened the workshop by welcoming all participants to the conference, thanking Ford Foundation and UN Women for their continued support for the engagement of Chinese and Indian feminist economists and the hosts at Yunnan Normal University. She introduced the workshop saying that this time round the focus was on work as it defines so much of women's experience. Building on previous experience, it was felt that there is scope for further and more detailed comparative investigations in gender-specific patterns of paid and unpaid work in China and India. She ended by noting that this is an area where there are strong differences across the two countries, but also sufficient similarities to make the comparison of trends worthwhile.

**Zhou Wen** (Yunnan Normal University) welcomed the participants and lauded the workshop which brought together academics from two different countries that faced similar problems in terms of issues related to women's employment. Pointing to the long and historical bonds that Kunming and different parts of India have, he gave instances of recent efforts made by the two countries to build stronger ties. Regarding employment, he said that is a basic right and it should be priority not only for the government but also for society. For women, having employment is most important for economic independence. Employment of women is a challenge not only for China and India, but all over the world. Because of the systemic, economic and social challenges that the world faces at present, employment of women would be facing more and newer challenges. It is important to try and find a solution to the issue of employment as it is crucial for sustainable development, building a harmonious society and to improve the social status of women. This workshop, therefore, is very important. The close collaboration between China and India is important as it has great potential for boosting both countries' development.

**Session 1: The Macroeconomic Context of Employment Trends**

In this session, moderated by **Andong Zhu** (School of Marxism, Tsinghua University), **C.P. Chandrasekhar** (Jawaharlal Nehru University) analysed some features of macroeconomic trends in employment on the basis of the theoretical frameworks of Keynes, Marx and Kalecki. In this context, he noted that unlike Keynes, Marx and Kalecki held the view that unemployment

was an inherent feature of capitalism. While the developed countries managed the problem of unemployment, it was mainly at the expense of underdeveloped countries. Thus, capitalist expansion and colonialism affected developing countries' levels of accumulation as well as the structural features of their agricultural sectors. Limited growth of the mass market for manufactures and the binding supply side constraint on availability of essential wage goods meant that without institutional reform, the problem of unemployment was likely to be more intense. Talking about the current development efforts in China and India, he said that while in the literature, it is claimed that China has now reached the Lewis turning point, he argued that, with rising wages and China being increasingly a private-enterprise economy, the unemployment problem could resurface. In the case of India, the problem in the neoliberal regime is that growth is led by certain services in which employment response is low. Further, unlike China, India's post-reform fiscal stance has been deflationary, which induces further contractionary bias into the system. This in turn means that because of these reforms, the worst kinds of labour market features (including gender discrimination) persist and intensify. He concluded on the note that there is a need to reduce the inherent problem of unemployment through regulation; otherwise, the existing forms of discrimination would only be exploited further.

The presentation was followed by interesting discussion around issues such as what the state can do to solve the problem of unemployment in India and China and the need to adopt more labour intensive strategies of growth to deal with the problem of unemployment. It was noted that the state can take two specific measures to deal with the problem of unemployment. One is to ensure that private agencies as well as the state behave in ways that employment responsiveness of output growth is high. Two, it has to adopt policies, such as land reforms, to relax the supply side constraints. Further, given that all services are not employment intensive and there are limits to which manufacturing can be expected to generate additional employment, what is important is to direct state investment into social services such as education and health, which are more employment intensive in nature.

The session also included a discussion on the role of technology in generating employment intensive growth. Several diverse positions regarding this came up during the discussion. One position was that even in a free market economy, labour intensive growth can be promoted simply by stopping incentives that distort the market (and push the system to be more capital intensive) and by providing a level playing field to small and medium enterprises. The other view was that a market system without any government incentives, would not necessarily promote labour-using technology. So, the point is to embrace technology (even if it is more capital intensive) that reduces drudgery, while focusing on using the surplus to provide productive employment in other activities.

In the discussion on the issue of China having reached the Lewis turning point, it was pointed out that, because the labour market is segmented and also because China has become a manufacturing base, while there is a shortage of unskilled and semi-skilled labour on the one hand, on the other the unemployment ratio of university graduates is very high.

## **Session 2: Recent employment trends**

The session, chaired by **Devaki Jain**, focused on issues surrounding the impact of trade on workers in general and women workers in particular, in China and India.

The first presentation by **Xiao-yuan Dong** (University of Winnipeg) reviewed policy changes that occurred since 2001 after China joined the WTO and their impact on the domestic labour market. Absolute and relative changes for men and women were examined among three groups of people: urban *hukou* holders, migrants and rural residents using national survey data from 2002 to 2010. Presenting chronologically policies introduced in different time periods, beginning with the introduction of the urban-rural *hukou* system in Mao's era (1949-1976), she argued that unlike in the twenty years since 1978, in the period since China joined the WTO in 2001, a more balanced approach between maintaining growth and efficiency on the one hand, and ensuring social justice and fairness to mitigate the negative consequences of trade liberalisation on the other, was adopted. Surveys using data for working-age men and women from seven provinces in China show that increases in women's LFPRs and employment rates during the latter period have been accompanied by a dramatic shift in women's employment from farm work to wage employment in industry and services, reduction in vulnerable employment for both men and women, increase in women's share in wage employment in non-agricultural activities, doubling of real earnings, and marked decrease in working poor rates. However, despite these positive changes, women continue to remain disadvantaged in the labour market when compared with men across various indices. She concluded by noting that although the Chinese government had played an important and successful role in balancing the distributional outcomes of globalisation, gender neutral policies were not sufficient for ensuring an equal outcome between men and women.

**Ritu Dewan** (Centre for Development Research and Action) in her presentation focused on aspects of the complex inter linkages between gender and trade. Regarding the inter linkages between gender and trade, she said that ownership, control and distribution of productive resources are central to the issue of whether women can or cannot gain from trade. She then presented case-studies of three sectors in India that are seen as 'feminised sectors', namely agriculture, textiles and marine products. Noting that in the agricultural sector, trade liberalisation has had significant negative impacts in the post-reform period, she argued that even if trade liberalisation unlocks export opportunities, it is unlikely that women farmers will

have the capacity and ability to take advantage of these. Land alienation and consolidation, with the movement from food to capital-intensive commercial cultivation, have displaced female employment first. She then mentioned the incidence of peasant suicides in certain states, which appeared to have a link to the higher levels of growth in those areas. In the textiles sector, which has witnessed a massive setback after the setting up of the WTO, there has been a dramatic decline in women's employment, specifically in the garments industry and women are concentrated at the lower ends of production, resulting in dismal working conditions for them. The third sector considered was marine products, in which, in addition to environmental violations, there has been displacement of women from production, as they are not perceived as 'fisher folk'. Export Processing Zones (EPZs), which primarily depend on women workers, are plagued with problems, such as long hours of work, poor pay and poor working conditions. Finally she mentioned various points that need to be given importance: gender-disaggregated data; categorisation of trade sectors and sub-sectors; gendered value-chain analyses; gendering programmes; and strategic alliances. She advocated pre-project surveys, formation of steering committees, full utilisation of gender budgeting and evaluation of non-tariff barriers, and suggested sharpening the methods used to identify the gendered impact of trade policies.

The presentations were followed by animated discussion with almost everyone present raising questions and comments. With regard to the paper on China, several comments and questions regarding China's experience on negotiating on the issue of providing agricultural subsidies under the WTO, reasons behind the improvement in workers' condition in China in the post WTO phase, the reasons as to why urban 'hukou' holders were worse off compared to migrants and rural residents, etc. were raised. It was noted that Dong's use of survey data relating to two period only could involve missing the intervening trends between those years, and that annual data show that women's work participation had risen sharply and then fallen slightly within the period. Equally varied questions and comments on the role gender economists can play on the issue of labour rights, the issue of loss of livelihood for women because of degradation of natural and environmental resources, were raised on the second presentation.

### **Session 3: The Macroeconomics of Women's Work**

The session, moderated by **Xiao-yuan Dong**, sought to understand how patriarchy has been influencing the macroeconomic processes in India, and the reasons behind the recent decline in the Work Participation Rate (WPR) of women in both India and China.

**Chirashree Das Gupta** (Dr. B. R. Ambedkar University) attempted to rectify a problem with the existing gender narratives by endogenising patriarchy to understand macroeconomic processes in India. To begin with, she traced the outcomes of the regime of accumulation in India in terms of indicators of changes in labour processes and the dynamics of capital-labour relations, arguing

that it is not true that stringent labour laws have deterred India's competitiveness. Rather, capitalism has grown solely on the basis of labour cheapening using caste and gender hierarchies. Further, she argued, labour cheapening has been facilitated by institutional governance structures, consisting of corporate governance; property, personal and tax laws; labour laws; and financial laws. All of these have been institutionalised right from the period after independence. Two important bases of patriarchy and institutions of macro economy relate to the definition of the worker and workplace, and the interstices of property, personal and tax laws, with the family as the basic unit of society or economy – specifically, the case of the Hindu Undivided Family (HUF). The HUF, along with the corporate governance structure, are the main two routes through which family control is exercised over capital. Other than the fact that the HUF suffers from heavy male bias, the status of HUF is used as a channel of saving tax on income and wealth by capitalist business houses of Hindu origin. Thereby, family and organisation of capital have become inter-linked. In spite of such clear violations of the constitutional rights to equality and property, there has been no attempt to withdraw this provision of favouring the major religious group. She concluded that the macroeconomic system has therefore sanctioned patriarchy across regimes and used gender, religious and caste differences to provide cheap labour to India's capitalists.

**Jayati Ghosh** (Jawaharlal Nehru University) compared the trends in Work Participation Rate (WPR) in India and China, while acknowledging that India, unlike China, has had a continuously low female WPR (about half the Chinese rate on average) not witnessed in any other similarly-growing country. This rate has come down even further recently, particularly in rural areas. Various factors such as increasing educational participation, mechanisation, ecological changes and social perceptions lie behind this trend. Also, rising wages have played a role in causing a withdrawal of women from the work force particularly in low income households. Noting that the decline in WPR is mainly in self-employment, she emphasised that the definition of work itself and the way it is captured in Indian data suffer from serious problems. The National Sample Survey (NSS) data excludes unpaid labour both in some productive activities and for social reproduction and even some forms of paid labour like prostitution. When these forms of labour are included, the female WPR is in fact higher than that of males and also declines less. The decline can then be explained by increasing participation in education. In addition, the data reveal a sharp increase in unpaid female labour in the recent period, which indicates a decline in public provisioning of services and a tightening of patriarchal control at the household level. She then compared these trends to the parallel trends in China, noting that in China too similar processes, such as an increasing gender gap in WPR particularly in the urban younger age group, have been at work. She, therefore, ended by saying that it seems that even in such different economies as India and China patriarchy is expressing itself in similar ways.

The subsequent discussion centred around issues such as the ways in which the Washington Consensus may have played a role in strengthening patriarchal institutions in India; whether it makes sense to keep using women's paid work as a measure of economic empowerment, given that it is so narrowly defined; the risk of putting too much emphasis on unpaid work done by women; the need to use time use surveys to better understand the characteristics of the workforce, etc. The major highlights of the discussion were that patriarchy has constantly adapted to the needs of capitalism. While mutable patriarchy has, in different ways, affected the macroeconomic processes in India even prior to the adoption of neoliberal policies, the Washington Consensus has intensified all of these processes. It was noted that considering unpaid work does not preclude considering paid work as well. With respect to valuation of unpaid work, it was felt that the point is not to include unpaid work in the national income, but rather to add these workers to the total number of workers to bring down the GDP per worker in order to reflect the actual situation.

#### **Session 4: The Recognition and Valuation of Women's Work**

**Feng Yuan** (Shantou University) raised three issues in her presentation: the reasons for the widening gender gap in labour force participation, earnings, and the ways to translate the educational and health gains of women into further gains, in China and India. Regarding the first issue, she argued that while increasing educational participation of women is one of the reasons for this, it could not explain the gender gap completely. With regard to the second issue, she contended that marital status may be one reason why women in China now work longer hours and yet, earn less than men. Time use data between 1990 and 2010 showed that the time spent on household work for females as a percentage of that for men has increased. This is the case even though a higher percentage of males agreed that men should share the burden of household work. Using gender equality indicators calculated across provinces by the Women's Studies Institute of China, she noted that the provinces that have performed well in terms of gender equality are not necessarily those with high economic development; she attributed these differences to political will. In answer to the last question that she had raised, using figures given by the World Economic Forum, she noted that while both India and China have come close to the sample average in terms of educational and health gains, there is a need to translate these gains into economic and political gains. In conclusion she stated that narrowing the gender wage gap would be beneficial for the economy as a whole.

**Indira Hirway** (Centre for Development Alternatives) in her presentation focused on the need to incorporate unpaid work into macroeconomics and the various approaches by which this can be done. To begin with, she argued, the name given to unpaid work itself reflects different approaches; she elaborated on two – one which sees it as 'care' and another as 'economic activity'. However, the division between paid and unpaid work is arbitrary and patriarchal in

nature. She then provided various reasons why there is a need for policy intervention to protect care and care-givers. As such, several solutions have been given to identify and integrate unpaid work. One solution is the 3R Approach: recognising unpaid care, reducing unpaid care work through better infrastructure and technology and redistributing care while ensuring that this role is not delegated to women alone. Another solution is monetary valuation; Input-Output methods have been used for this purpose but have now been superseded by Satellite accounts. Nevertheless, valuation has its limitations. To incorporate unpaid work, it is crucial to first understand the determinants of the distribution of paid and unpaid work between men and women and the differential impact of policies on paid and unpaid work. For this purpose, she advocated the collection of time use data. Although China and India have conducted time use surveys, neither have done so at the national level; the background schedule and context variables have also not been appropriately selected. She therefore emphasised the need to collect data systematically so as to incorporate unpaid work into macroeconomic policies.

Summing up the two presentations, the chair, **Shen Youjia**, opened the floor for discussion. Several interesting points came up during the discussion. It was highlighted that recognition of unpaid work is crucial, not only because it is difficult to understand one without the other, but also because unpaid work determines the terms under which women can access the labour market; forms the basis of low reservation wages; affects the labour market and earnings of paid female and male workers; affects the ease of access of women to the labour market. At the same time, however, it is important to recognise that since unpaid work is distributed by class, the value of unpaid work should not be incorporated into GDP, as it would end up distorting the distributive results.

### **Session 5: Women workers and time use in agriculture**

The session provided an overview of women workers and their time use in agriculture and allied sectors in India and China. It highlighted how the care burden and the non-recognition of the value of women's work undermine women workers' contribution to these two sectors.

**Liqin Zhang** (China Agriculture University) began by introducing the background of left-behind women and the feminisation of agriculture in China. According to her data, women accounted for over half of total labour in agriculture, and women's unpaid care work of household members included both direct and indirect care. To investigate the impact of caregiving by rural women on agricultural labour supply and production, she used a dataset based on samples of 8,000 rural households, with about 32,000 individuals from nine Chinese provinces, in 2003 and 2012. Her statistics showed that in terms of average working days and average agricultural labour input of rural households, women still worked longer than men, despite the recent narrowing of the gap. She also highlighted that rural married women aged 25-45 years had more care responsibility, and found that both women and households with more care responsibility had lower agricultural

productivity. Her preliminary estimations shows that because of the caregiving burden, women's nonfarm labour participation is much lower than that of men on the one hand and on the other, female-maintained farms are less productive than those headed by males.

**Sanchari Roy Mukherjee** (North Bengal University) focused on the issue of economic status of women in the plantation sector in India and began on the note that high work participation by women in the plantation sector creates an illusion that production relations in the sector are gender-equitable and it promotes economic self-reliance among an empowered group of rural women. Summing up the distinctive characteristics of the tea industry at present, she highlighted that other than having a large number of women workers, the sector uses family labour, which helps to keep labour virtually captive on the estate since alternative employment opportunities are almost nonexistent. Further, the plantation sector is characterised by the non-fulfilment of the statutory benefits and obligations and rising informalisation. Regarding wage determination, she noted that a combination of factors including the practice of joint family labour, refusal to convert benefits to money wages and non-recognition of the value of women's work, etc. have contributed to the practice of fixing 'subsistence wages' as 'minimum wages' in plantations, particularly in Assam and West Bengal. Further, women face wage discrimination, as they are paid piece rate wages, whereas men get time rate wages and fulfilling the basic tasks to get the subsistence wages requires more than 8 hours of work, whereas men finish their work in 4-5 hours. On the whole, there is devaluation of women's work since their specialised work or abilities are unrecognised and unrewarded. Thus, she concluded, high women's participation in plantation work reflects freezing of pre-capitalistic gender work divisions, informalisation of women's work-opportunities, denial of autonomous valuation to women's work, denial of welfare benefits to women and devaluation of women's work experience.

Commenting that both the presentations brought out how women in both China and India were being exploited, the chair, **Wei Zhang**, opened the floor for discussion. The major issues that were put forward were: whether the women farmers in China are less productive than male farmers only because of their care work or there are other reasons behind it; whether valuation of women's individual entitlement would help to deal with the problem of the primary male bread winner model usually emphasised in policy measures; and with respect to plantation workers in West Bengal, the failure of the state government to intervene into affairs of the plantation sector especially when it comes to women's welfare.

## **DAY 2: 27<sup>th</sup> September 2014**

### **Session 6: Informality and women's work - 1**

This session, chaired by **Zhun Xu** (Renmin University), outlined the starkly contrasting situation of women workers in the informal sectors in China and India.



**Fan Lulu** (The Hong Kong Polytechnic University) presented her research on female-led cooperative production teams in the garment industry of China. Noting that there has been a quantum jump of female workers in the informal sector in the era of globalisation, she said that in China too, the scale of informal employment had increased significantly. Based on her fieldwork of the garment industry in the Yangtze River Delta Region in China (which is a female-dominated industry), she argued that workers with stronger bargaining power tended to work in the informal sector voluntarily. Some local skilled women workers even organised cooperative production teams to launch collective bargaining with subcontracting agents to ask for higher wages. On the whole, she argued, higher wages, autonomy and dignity of work, and balancing work-life conflict, are the three main reasons why skilled women choose to work in the informal sector. Further, women workers have the choice to work as informal workers as the labour shortage in labour intensive industries like garment is very serious, especially in coastal areas. She contributed to the explanation of labour shortage in China by emphasising its gender dimension.

**Smita Gupta** (Indian School of Women's Studies and Development, New Delhi) started by noting the importance of home based work as a form of employment in India. Talking about the nature of such employment, she noted that, in addition to all the problems faced by many informal sector workers, the invisibility of home based workers compounds their vulnerabilities as an informal labour force. She described a primary survey in which data were collected from 500 home based workers mainly involved in vertical and horizontal subcontracting, at different locations in Delhi. Following an exploration of the socio-economic conditions of the home based workers, she pointed out that most of the women workers were found to be engaged in piece-rate work. In the study sample, 83% of the workers were part of the subcontracting system, doing a whole range of occupations for some of the most 'modern' industries such as automobiles, computer technology and telecommunications. However, there is little or no control of home workers on the production process as a result of which they are vulnerable to exploitation and harassment with almost no bargaining power. Availability of work also varies significantly and they face myriad problems such as space constraint, long and uncertain working hours, delays and arbitrary deductions in payment by the contractors, occupational health issues, etc. Adding that the earning from this kind of work is very low and most were not beneficiaries of any social security scheme meant for citizens of the country, she argued that, given the large number of intermediaries, it is difficult to identify the actual employers and hence the traditional approach of providing social security or even forming trade unions is not feasible. To ensure their well-being, it is necessary that the state provides social security that covers their basic needs of food, education, old age pension, health insurance, etc.

Results of the first presentation showing that informal sector workers manage to earn much more than formal sector workers in the garment industry in China, generated a lot of discussion. What came out in this discussion was that the high earnings are a result of the long hours of

work put in. However, it is only in labour intensive industries, where workers have the tools they need to work with at home, it is possible to have high earnings, even when working in the informal sector. The discussion on the paper on the situation of home based workers in Delhi, centred around issues such as methodology used to calculate earnings, constraints on forming unions by workers involved in horizontal subcontracting, the challenges faced in forming unions and how to get such women workers recognised as workers.

### **Session 7: Informality and Women's Work - 2**

In this session, chaired by **Nirmala Banerjee**, the papers focused on the problem of time poverty faced by women in China and the plight of women engaged in the informal sectors in India and highlighted the need for suitable policies to address these problems.

**Liangshu Qi** (Tsinghua University) measured the time poverty rates of workers in five provinces of China and examined whether better implementation of labour regulations could reduce this rate. She defined time poverty using the capabilities approach based on necessary work time; by this definition, about 7% of Chinese urban prime-working-age employed workers face time poverty. On considering the characteristics of the sample, it appeared that women workers aged between 30-50 years, those who have children aged above six years of age, are less educated and in the bottom income quintile, are more likely to be time-poor. A simulation exercise carried out to understand whether the time poverty rate would change if minimum wage and working time regulations are strictly implemented, revealed that strictly implementing these regulations would make the time poverty rate fall drastically. Further, if the minimum wage rate is raised to 60 per cent of the median wage rate, men would almost cease to be time poor but not women. She thus concluded that along with strict implementation of employment regulations, suitable policies to reduce the burden of unpaid housework on working women are needed.

**Vibhuti Patel** (SNDT University) spoke on the increasingly informal nature of women's employment in India, particularly with reference to urban areas, and the continued indifference of the state towards protecting their basic rights. Since the 1980s, mechanisation of traditional industries has relegated women to the informal sector. Large corporate firms underpay these women and then sell the products made by these women at much higher prices. Thus, there is a strong link between formal and informal sectors. Meanwhile, the trade union movement has disintegrated. In Mumbai, in the name of increasing productivity, cheaper female labour has replaced male labour. The state facilitates such practices while withdrawing from the provision of social security. With technological advancement, the burden of supporting the family is increasingly falling on women. However, the fall in employment opportunities in rural areas has driven women to migrate to urban areas and be employed in distress occupations. In this context, she commented on the rising demand for domestic workers who have to divide their

time between unpaid household work and degrading paid work. To address these issues, gender budgeting is required. She called for a much larger role of the government at the centre and the state in protecting health and reproductive rights, providing basic services, and effectively implementing the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, 2008. She concluded that employers' organisations and the state need to come together to contribute to social security, which needs to be viewed as a long-term investment.

During the question answer session a number of interesting points came up for discussion. Discussion on the first paper focused on the measurement issues related to time poverty; the reasons for the surprisingly low rates of time poverty, including possible sources of underestimation in the survey data; consideration of why the presence of children of a certain age has a larger impact on time poverty of the households, etc. Issues such as measures that can be taken to increase awareness about the condition of the workers and the underlying reasons behind the conditions of informal workers formed the core of the discussion on the second presentation of the session.

### **Session 8: Unpaid work and the care economy**

Session 8, moderated by **Indira Hirway**, focused on the issue of the care economy and unpaid work of women, with the three panellists highlighting different aspects of the issue.

**Shen Youjia** (The People's University of China) focussed on the issue of the care crisis and the distribution of child care in the context of the second child policy initiated in China in 2013. She argued that economic and social factors are the main factors explaining the low fertility rate in China and China's one-child policy norm had very little to do with it. In this context she mentioned that other than the financial burden it entails, factors such as little sharing of care work by men, inability to afford expensive private care services because of low level of wages and the lack of willingness on part of the State to provide affordable public care services or subsidise private care lie behind people not opting for the second child. Analysing the different aspects related to the care burden, she argued that the culturally determined division of domestic labour and care work prevents women from having decent jobs or economic independence. Looking at the consequences of privatisation of care services, she noted that in China owing to increasing demand for care services, costs of such services have gone up phenomenally. But because of the availability of care work only in informal markets lacking proper contracts and regulations, care workers' rights are not effectively protected and employers too face multiple problems. Noting the problems with the pricing and quality of such services she concluded that lack of suitable public policies regarding leave for parents, allowance for child welfare, public child care policies, housewife pension, etc., implies that the government's two-child policy is meant only to help capitalists get access to cheap labour and

there is little that has been done to help solve the problem of distribution of the newborn's care burden.

**Lan Liu** (Peking University) in her presentation explored the causal relationship between the provision of unpaid care work by middle-aged men and women in urban China, their labour supply and the gender differences therein. Regression analysis using data from the China Family Panel Studies, 2010 shows that unpaid care work (which has become an increasingly common phenomenon for middle-aged men and women in urban China) has negative effect on both men and women's labour force participation (LFP) and work hours.. Furthermore, compared to men, a larger proportion of women bear the burden of unpaid care and they also provide longer hours of care. The study also showed that while unpaid care had stronger negative effect on women's LFP compared to men, the negative impact on work hours was stronger in case of men than women. Thus, she said that for middle-aged people approaching retirement age, policy measures should be introduced to reduce the conflicts of caregiving responsibility and labour supply. Also, retirement policy should be formulated for both men and women, taking into account the gender differences mentioned in the study.

**Subhalakshmi Nandi** (UN Women, India) presented a discursive analysis on the issue of women's work, the current understanding about it and the various contestations and debates concerning these. Discussing in detail how unpaid care work has been understood from the grassroots perspectives and in the arena of academic work, she noted that politics guiding the policy and discourse on women's unpaid work has given rise to several points of contestation and debate. In this context she said that there three broad sites of contestation, around definitional issues, locational issues and policy responses. Regarding the first, she mentioned that the fundamental tensions have been in the definition of work and worker; the default emphasis on 'care' and 'housework', at the cost of other forms of unpaid work; blurred lines between the 'public' and the 'private';etc.Sites of contestation related to locational issues arise from disciplinary orientation to research and practice; cultural factors; the North-south divide; and political ideology. Finally, in terms of policy responses, debates have centred around issues such as whether valuation of work is the most effective response or whether there is need to have more broad-based organising for universal social protection, essential services and infrastructure; whether policy response should be at the unit of family or individual or have more collective responses; the pitting of labour rights against gender-based violence, etc. So, seen from a feminist perspective, a review of literature on women's work clearly brings out that there is close linkage between work, labour and bodily integrity; that the shaping of choices regarding work is driven by the fact that the only resources poor women have are their time, labour and bodies and finally, political ideologies can impact organising, affect solidarity and even foster institutions of patriarchy. She emphasised that more work needs to be done on the complex links between labour, feminist and queer theories.

Several interesting points came up during the discussion. The major issues that came up centred around how reforms in China have been associated with withdrawal of state provided child care policies, as well as the need to recognise work already done in the South on women's paid and unpaid work; etc.

## **Session 9: Changing Employment Patterns and Gender Gaps**

**Li Qin** (South China Agriculture University) considered the characteristics of migrant workers who transfer from developed to less developed areas in China, the wage differences between these regions and the reasons behind them. To begin with, the characteristics of the sample indicated that migrant workers in transfer-out regions tend to be more educated, have more work experience and earn higher wages than those in transfer-in regions. With respect to wage differences between the two regions, her regression results indicated that a higher level of education and work experience increase wages of migrant workers in any region, but more so in transfer-out regions. Further, a decomposition exercise revealed that more than 90 per cent of the wage advantage in transfer-out regions is explained by the difference in characteristics. Education plays the greatest role in explaining wage differences between the regions. Following from these results, she suggested policies for underdeveloped areas, such as improving infrastructure and expanding social security to migrant workers.

**Neetha N. Pillai** (Centre for Women's Development Studies) described the sub-sectoral distribution of the shift in women's employment in the services sector in India, to understand whether the sector can be expected to provide a large proportion of women's employment. She began by noting that in spite of an increase in the proportion of women employed in this sector between 1999-2000 and 2011-12, the share of women employed in the sectors is still very low. Within the services sector, the sub-sector trade, hotels and restaurants still employs the highest proportion of women but this has declined over time. Education, modern services and private households witnessed an increase in the proportion of women employed, but modern services sector did not see a correspondingly high increase in the share of women. Considering the sub-categories within the education and modern business services sectors, she noted that there is a clear concentration of women in certain sub-categories, which reveals sex-based segmentation. Closer inspection reveals that these two sectors cater to women with a higher level of education, those who come from upper castes and OBC social groups. Further, the proportion of women in the 15-30 age group and those of 'never married' status are very high and increasing in the business services sector, unlike other sectors. Although there is a high percentage of women with long-term contracts in this sector, the proportion of those without written contracts is also very high and has increased over time, reflecting increasing informalisation in the sector. She

concluded on the note that the low share of women in these sectors implies that the modern services sector is unlikely to bring about a transformation in employment patterns, despite recent increases. The sectors which have higher proportions of female employment do not offer much promise either.

In the question answer session, a number of points were raised, such as what motivates the workers to migrate to less-developed areas; whether the workers migrate voluntarily or out of compulsion when the factories move, were discussed. The discussion on the second presentation focused on issues such as whether the expansion of the services sector can lead to an overall increase in labour force participation of women and the extent of unionisation among these women, etc.

### **DAY 3: 28<sup>th</sup> September 2014**

#### **Session 10: Gender discrimination in public and private employment**

The session, moderated by **Jayati Ghosh**, traced the how women are discriminated against in the labour market, by state and the private sector in both India and China.

**Yuhao Ge** (Renmin University)'s presentation was on gender discrimination in employment opportunities among college graduates in China. To begin with, he listed the kinds of gender discrimination in the labour market, namely in employment opportunity, wage or salary and promotions; he chose to study the first, and specifically for college graduates, as there had been very few studies on this topic. In the experiment designed, the college graduates in the sample were asked to make two resumes each: one with their true information, and another changing only the gender and keeping other information intact. The resumes were then put on job websites, and after a deadline, data were collected on the number of (preliminary) job offers. Using data collected from 95 participants and 190 observations, the coefficient of discrimination on the number of job offers for male and female applicants was calculated by various characteristics. Results show that there is higher discrimination against female applicants when they appear more successful, in terms of whether they are graduates, have a good GPA or a high level of English. This result was only different in the case of interns. To explain gender discrimination, he used the statistical discrimination theory, which considers the true productivity of the individual to the weighted average of the individual observable human capital score and the average score of the group to which he/she belongs. Employers assume that for male applicants, the former is more important while for female applicants, the latter is. Thus, for a higher individual score, employers assume that male applicants have higher true productivity and therefore employ them; at a lower score, they employ the females. On that basis he concluded that the gender discrimination in employment opportunities among college graduates may be the result of information asymmetry.

Women in public services and their rights as workers formed the theme of **Indrani Mazumdar's** (Centre for Women's Development Studies) presentation. She began by giving an outline of the certain features of official public sector employees and the role played by the public sector in women's employment in India. She noted that a large number of women working in the public services were employed as so-called volunteers or activists and were deprived not only of employment rights but also of any legal entitlement like minimum wages and social security benefits. Saying that there are three principal programmes through which the Central Government of India has evolved a massive system of underpaying and using women as the cheapest workforce for the delivery of essential public services, she detailed the arduous work these workers are required to do and the pittance they are paid. However, she noted, these schemeworkers have emerged as a significant force in movements of women workers commanding a new respect and support from even male trade unionists. In fact in the battle for survival in a generally anti-labour environment, other trade unions too have turned to these women workers. Paradoxically, the organisation of these all female cadres of workers has been by the mixed gender based trade union organisations and the all-women trade union in India, SEWA, has not been able to organise women like this, except in the case of self employed women. This provides a good example of how the modes of building trade unions need to change so as to incorporate workers with dual characteristics as workers and as public employees.

In the ensuing discussion, strong reservations were expressed against Yuhoa Ge's argument that gender discrimination faced by college graduates in the labour market is the result of information asymmetry (and in any case the situation he described was one of incomplete rather than asymmetric information). It was pointed out that patriarchy provides a more convincing explanation for the gender discrimination observed in the study and there is need to go beyond neoclassical explanations and take into consideration other theories such as institutional theories. In the discussion on Indrani Mazumdar's papers, it came out that it is not true that earlier studies on women workers in India had only considered self-employed workers and many attempts have been made to organise women engaged in other forms of employment. It was also noted that the issue of trade unions is more complex, as parallel teachers in India have been the most radical force in this respect but have been ignored by most of the central trade unions.

### **Session 11: Organising Women Workers**

The papers in this session, chaired by **Weiwei Ren**, focused on issues of whether being member of a union in China has any impact on the gender wage gap and the increasing problems of unionising women workers in India in the current phase of capitalism.

**Jing Liu** (Central University of Finance and Economics) studied the impact of trade unions on the gender wage gap in ten cities of China. Regression analysis seemed to indicate that unions reduce the gender wage gap. However, there is a source of endogeneity in this regression in that employees may volunteer to be a member of the union or not; such a selection problem would bias the results. On correcting the data for this selection problem, it became clear that unions do not reduce the gender wage gap; the earlier effect is therefore a result of personal self-selection. These results were supplemented by a decomposition exercise. She thereby concluded that affiliation to trade unions does not significantly reduce the gender wage gap in these cities.

**Sujata Gothoskar** (Forum Against Oppression of Women) spoke about the difficulties in organising women workers in the current stage of capitalism. She mentioned various attempts to organise by women workers in different sectors of the informal economy in recent years. However, it has increasingly become harder to do so in the formal economy, with employers engaging in more aggressive accumulation. Thus, she stated that we seem to be moving into a phase where formation of unions in the informal sector has increased whereas forming unions in the formal sector has become more difficult. In this context, she mentioned the polarised positions aired in current debates on various issues such as contract labour, night work for women and their participation in trade unions. Although there have been experiments to organise at the micro-level, women workers face great challenges in their attempts to do so. She concluded with the point that while it was easier for workers to organise in the earlier stages of capitalism, the current stage of capitalism has made it more difficult for them to organise.

Following the presentations, a number of issues came up for discussion. With regard to the first presentation, two basic issues; the reasons behind the choice of trade unions and the difference in the impact of trade unions on the gender wage gap, depending on whether a person joined a union out of their own choice or they were chosen by their employers to join a union; formed the core of the discussion. It was noted that the institutional basis of trade unions in China is very different from workers' associations elsewhere, and that this is important for analysing the situation in China. Comments and questions on Sujata Gothoskar's presentation focussed on issues like the usefulness of relying on the dichotomy between informal and formal sectors, given that the struggles are mainly against the increasing informalisation of the formal sector, whether there is blurring of the traditional distinction between trade unions and women's organisations, and the replicability of various organising strategies explored in the presentation.

## **Session 12: Closing Remarks and Plans for the Future**

The session began with **Devaki Jain**, thanking the organisers for the excellent planning and execution of this fourth workshop in the series. She expressed satisfaction that the academic content has sharpened over the four workshops held so far. She also appreciated that, unlike in



earlier workshops, this time, there had been focus on a particular topic. While complimenting the Chinese economists on their technical prowess, she suggested that they can form a network of feminist economists, conduct conferences in order to build stronger alliances. This can be an interesting way of building a lobby, which can then make suggestions even on public policy issues. She advocated that both countries, which have had very similar outcomes in terms of the impact on women's employment and conditions of work and life, join together to critique the reform process in these countries. She also noted that interventions made by feminist economists in the arrangements in trade between India and China could provide some ways of protecting women workers. **Xiao-yuan Dong** also expressed her satisfaction with the success of the conference and said that the learning through the exchanges of ideas in the feminist economics conferences has been extremely significant. In this context, she said that the Chinese economists need to consider the context of the country and thereby enrich their analyses. She also emphasised on the need to adopt a multi-disciplinary approach and to work towards a socially inclusive, environmentally sustainable approach to policy. Like Devaki Jain, she too felt that the two countries can come together and challenge liberalisation policies. It is therefore important to continue such dialogue and further strengthen the network. **Nirmala Banerjee** added that, as is being done by the Chinese economists, it would be interesting to have young Indian scholars participate and share their work on empirical issues. **Andong Zhu** said that there is a need to build up a feminist network not just of economists but also of social sciences. And he, along with his colleagues, would definitely hold more such conferences among the Chinese scholars. Saying that the discussions had been very fruitful, **Jayati Ghosh** added that there is a lot more to do and a lot more that can be discussed together to develop ways in which a comparative method can be used to enhance the understanding about the economy and society of both countries. The workshop ended with a vote of thanks.